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ENGLAND SERIES ON: TESTS TO BE HELD IN CHEPAUK, MOTERA

BCCI releases itinerary. Chennai and Ahmedabad to host two five-day matches each, with Pune hosting ODI leg

5 T20Is, PINK-BALL MATCH IN AHMEDABAD

New stadium to host day-night Test apart from all five T20Is at the culmination of Test series. Pune will play host to all three ODIs as board limits venues to three since tour is being held in a bio-bubble. "The BCCI has restricted the tour to just three venues keeping in mind the current pandemic situation prevailing in the country," the BCCI release said | P13

VENUES OK WITH FANS, DECISION LATER

- Though venues are fine with allowing fans inside, BCCI did not mention about their decision as of now since govt has not permitted spectators inside. A decision might be taken later
- England will travel directly to Chennai after the end of the Test series in Sri Lanka in January. The first Test is from February 5

Feb 24-28

DATES OF PINK BALL TEST, FIRST INTERNATIONAL AT NEW STADIUM

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Let differences not create any disconnect: PM

Lays foundation stone for new Parliament building; harps on supreme national interest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

AMID the ongoing stand-off between farmers and the Centre over the contentious farm sector reform laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday stressed the need to stay connected despite differences.

"Apart from governance, democracy has always been a medium to resolve differences of opinion. Differences strengthen democracy. While there should be space for differences, there should not be any disconnect," Modi said, while laying the foundation stone for the new Parliament building.

Modi harped on the supremacy of national interest, despite differences. "The determination to serve the nation and dedication to national interest should be reflected constantly," he said. Underscoring the importance of healthy interactions, Modi invoked the teachings of Guru Nanak, who said "dialogue must go on". The choice of a Nanak couplet was perhaps his attempt at maintaining connectivity with the protesting Sikh farmers.

If the old Parliament House gave direction to the country after Independence, the new one will be witness to the making of an Aatmanirbhar Bharat, he said, adding it will have many new features to help increase efficiency and improve the work culture of members of Parliament.

However, the construction of the new Parliament building cannot begin for now as the Supreme Court is hearing petitions challenging the project on environmental grounds.

The new Parliament House is part of an ambitious ₹20,000 crore Central Vista project to refurbish buildings over a 3 km stretch between Rashtrapati Bhavan and the iconic War Memorial at India Gate.

Modi performed the groundbreaking ceremony amid chanting of *mantras* by priests from the Sringeri Mutt in Karnataka. Around 200 dignitaries, including ministers, lawmakers, foreign envoys and religious leaders attended. Ratan Tata, whose Tata Projects bagged the contract, was also present.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lays the foundation stone for a new Parliament building as part of the Central Vista project, in New Delhi on Thursday | PTI

> If work was done to fulfil the needs of the country in the old Parliament building, then the aspirations of 21st century India will be fulfilled in the new building
>
> Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

Mother of democracy

Indian democratic traditions predate the 13th century Magna Carta, Modi said, adding the day is not far when the world will term India the mother of democracy

Karnataka may go to NGT over vexed Kasturirangan report

Villagers in Malnad region fear they may be evicted; MLAs propose Kerala model to reduce extent of eco-sensitive area

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

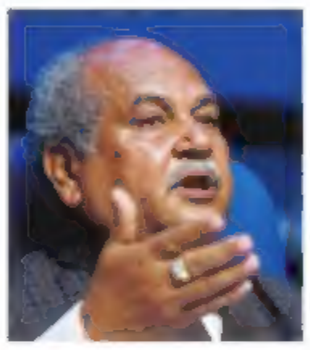
THE State Government is likely to approach the National Green Tribunal to implead itself in the case on implementation of the Kasturirangan report. Primary Education Minister Suresh Kumar, who was replying to the Assembly on Thursday, said the government is exploring options to clarify Karnataka's stand before the tribunal.

Suresh Kumar said the state has formed a cabinet sub-committee and its report will be sent to the Central Government before the final notification is issued. On the last day of the truncated winter session, legislators in the Assembly discussed about the final notification of the eco-sensitive area (ESA) of the Western Ghats in Karnataka. The BJP members urged the government to adopt the Kerala model for implementation of the Kasturirangan report recommendations.

BJP legislator V Sunil Kumar urged the government to resurvey the 1,576 villages in Karnataka, identified in the report, as per the Kerala model. Thirthahalli MLA Agara Jnanendra said if Karnataka follows the Kerala model, the 20,668 sq km area eco-sensitive area can be reduced to around 13,000 sq km.

Kerala had constituted a committee which studied each and every village and reduced the extent of the ESA that was recommended in the report. The MLAs feared that the final notification may even lead to violence in the Malnad areas. There is a fear that those who are residing in the ESA will be evacuated if their village is included in the final notification, the lawmakers pointed out. P4

PREPARED FOR TALKS, SAYS GOVT AMIDST WAITING GAME



Blocking railway traffic on the cards

New Delhi: Intensifying their protests further, farmer unions on Thursday disclosed plans to block railway tracks across the country if their demand to repeal three contentious farm sector reform laws is not met, though a date for it has not been set yet

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

A day after protesting farmers rejected the Centre's written proposals, including amendments, to address their concerns on the three farm sector reform laws, the government reiterated its willingness to continue talks while indicating that their repeal was not negotiable.

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said, "Whenever you are ready, the government will be prepared for talks."

Farmers, he said, were not forthcoming on specific issues and were harping only on rolling back the laws. "We tried to cull out their concerns and address them. We have given proposals to allay their misgivings. I will request them to come forward for talks," Tomar and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal said at a press conference.

Giving clear indications that the government will not accept the unions' main demand to repeal the three laws, the ministers said that farm laws were formulated after due consideration and to benefit farmers and the entire sector. "No law can be completely wrong. The government wants to stress that it is willing to discuss any specific sticking issues farmers may want to flag."

Regarding the demand for a separate law guaranteeing the minimum support price (MSP) mechanism, Tomar said the provision has nothing to do with these laws. "PM Narendra Modi and I have repeatedly assured the farmers that the MSP system will stay." P9

Big attack on Nadda's convoy in West Bengal

PRONAB MONDAL @ Kolkata

BJP national president J P Nadda's convoy was on Thursday intercepted and attacked with bricks and empty soft drink bottles at several places in West Bengal allegedly by Trinamool Congress workers.

Nadda, who is on a two-day visit to Bengal, was on his way to Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas district, the Lok Sabha constituency of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, when his convoy came under attack.

The BJP president, who was in a bullet-proof vehicle, was unhurt but the party's Bengal observer Kailash Vijayvargiya received injuries on his left forearm as the windshields of his car were smashed with a brickbat.

Over 15 vehicles of BJP leaders, including BJP state president Dilip Ghosh, and security personnel were damaged and a party worker's head was fractured in the attack. P10

BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya receives treatment following an attack on party president JP Nadda's convoy at Sirakal near Diamond Harbour on Thursday | PTI

A LONG MARCH

A child waving the Tricolour takes part in a protest along with activists of several organisations, against the Centre's contentious farm laws, in Bengaluru on Thursday | VINOD KUMAR T

BBMP

BILL PASSED IN ASSEMBLY

Even as the leaders from both the Congress and JDS boycotted Assembly proceedings opposing the passage of the cow slaughter bill, the state government got the BBMP bill passed without any Opposition. The bill proposed a 2.5-year term for both Mayor and Deputy Mayor, while the existing eight zones will be increased to 15. Each zone will act like a mini municipal corporation with the zonal commissioners getting more power. P2

Sonia to retire, Sharad Pawar to take over as UPA chairperson?

RICHA SHARMA @ New Delhi

WITH Congress chief Sonia Gandhi keeping unwell, NCP chief Sharad Pawar could take over as chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), sources told *TNIE*.

Pawar is the senior-most leader among UPA allies and enjoys cordial relationship with leaders across political parties. He, along with CPM general-secretary Sitaram Yechury, coordinated a meeting of Opposition parties with President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday over the farmers' agitation. It was Pawar who led the delegation comprising Yechury, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, CPI general-secretary D Raja and DMK leader T K S Elangovan.

According to Congress sources, Sonia Gandhi wants to retire from active politics.

Sharad Pawar

Sonia Gandhi

Passing the baton to Rahul in December 2017 was part of the process. But after Rahul stepped down following the Congress' poor performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Sonia agreed to be interim chief.

Sources pointed out that Sonia has been in and out of hospital due to severe lung infection. She could not campaign in the Lok Sabha elections in 2019 due to poor health.

"The Congress is the largest party in the UPA. So, the chairperson has to be from the Congress. But if Sonia retires, Pawar, being the seniormost among UPA allies may take over the responsibility of uniting the opposition and putting up a strong fight against the Modi regime," said sources.

Pawar had resigned from the Congress in 1991, raising Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. And, it is common knowledge that there continues to be a trust deficit between Pawar and Sonia. However, given the BJP's growing clout and the Congress' weak position, the NCP leader could emerge the strong face of the Opposition.

However, both NCP and Congress denied any leadership change in the UPA. NCP chief spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said there has been no discussion within UPA regarding any such proposal. The Congress said the news is spread by vested interests to divert attention from farmers' agitation.

Govt plays safe in Council, doesn't table cattle bill

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A day after the controversial Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill (2020) was rushed through the Assembly amid a walkout by the opposition Congress, a cautious BJP government chose not to table it in the Legislative Council on Thursday.

The Bill was listed on the agenda of the Council proceedings for Thursday and it was expected that the government will table the Bill for approval of the Upper House. The BJP members and ministers were wearing saffron shawls as the Bill was scheduled to be taken up for a debate. However, the government refrained from doing so, citing the absence of the minister concerned (Animal Husbandry Minister Prabhu Chavan).

Sources pointed out that when a Bill is passed in the Assembly and tabled in the Council, the opposition can demand that it be referred to a joint select committee. If the ruling party members don't agree, the Council chairman can call for voting on it. P6

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